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ABSTRACT

A national sample (N=215) of community and residential facilities were surveyed regarding existing vocational programs for severely and profoundly mentally retarded persons. Among findings was that only 4% (N=9) of the facilities offered vocational programs for the severely and profoundly retarded. The survey indicated that community and state vocational programs have been almost nonexistent for the severely and profoundly developmentally disabled as of 1977. (SBH)

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Surveying Vocational Programs For The Severely and Profoundly Retarded (1977): A Historical Perspective

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Surveying Vocational Programs For The Severely and Profoundly Retarded (1977): A Historical Perspective

Vocational programs in the community and in mental health facilities have been highly selective in the admission of persons with severe and profound retardation (Bellamy & Warfield, 1975). Typically only the highest functioning individuals (mild, and moderately retarded) have been permitted to participate in the programs (Barhoff, 1974; Voelker, 1962). The selective admission process screens out the lowest functioning individuals (severely and profoundly retarded) limiting their developmental or learning opportunities (Congdon, 1974; Wehman, 1975; Wehman, 1976). This selective process has been justified on the basis that some persons could not benefit from vocational programs (Gold, 1973; Gold, 1972; Loos & Tizard, 1955). The common belief of professionals in many rehabilitation settings is that severely and profoundly retarded persons are able to perform only the simplest of tasks (Bellamy, 1975; Clarke & Harmelin, 1955; Crosson, 1969; Gold, 1973; Tate & Barhoff, 1967).

Vocational programs have had a major impact on the rehabilitation of the developmentally disabled (Olshanski, 1972; Parmenter, 1976; Wehman, 1976; Wolfensberger, 1967). Through sheltered employment, many mild and moderate developmentally disabled clients have learned vocational skills and acceptable work behavior (Crosson, 1969; Sanders, 1975; Zimmerman & Overpeck, 1969). Employment has become an achievable goal within sheltered care and other independent living facilities

(Crosson, 1970; Karen, Eisner & endres, 1974; Screven, Straka & LaFord, 1971; Zimmerman & Overpeck, 1969). For the severely or profoundly retarded person, such programs are presently underdeveloped although recently various models have been presented in the literature (Budde & Menolascino, 1971; Gold, 1974; Levy, Pomerantz & Gold, 1975; Watson, 1968; Williams, 1967; Antonelli, Olson, & Thompson, 1979).

Most severely and profoundly retarded persons are confined in an institutionalized setting and may participate in programs described as prevocational, vocational readiness or vocational preparedness classes (Jackson & Antonelli, 1978). On close observation these programs can be defined as classes in which the clients may engage in tool skills, assembly tasks, stacking blocks, stringing beads or engaging in arts and crafts activities (Congdon, 1974; Jackson & Antonelli, 1978).

The present trend in vocational rehabilitation, mental health and special education indicates a need for comprehensive program approaches and teaching methods for severe and profound persons in the vocational setting. This study conducted a national sample of community and residential facilities regarding existing programs for severely and profoundly retarded persons. The present study reviews the results of that survey.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

A national sample of 459 private and public facilities were identified which were accredited by either the Joint Commission of Accreditation of Hospitals or the Commission on Accreditation of

Rehabilitation Facilities. A standard form letter was sent to 389 randomly selected facilities. The letter requested that information regarding current vocational programs which served the severely and profoundly retarded be mailed to the authors.

Results

The facilities responding to the form letter numbered 215. These responses included a letter and/or a description of current vocational programs and the population served. The respondents represented thirty states and the District of Columbia. A total of 4% or nine of the facilities reported that they offered vocational programs for the severely and profoundly retarded. A total of 96% or 206 facilities indicated that no current programs were offered for the severely or profoundly retarded person.

Summary and Discussion

Minimal expectancies of the severely and profoundly retarded persons have been well entrenched in the mainstream of society (Delp, 1957; Gold, 1975; Tredgold, 1908). Past literature has described mental facilities which have made no attempt to occupy severly and profoundly retarded residents (Congdon, 1974; Loos & Tizard, 1955). Professional and social attitudes based on classifications viewed the severe and profound as "custodial" cases (Nirje, 1970; Olshanski, 1972; Wolfensberger, 1972).

Institutions for the severely and profoundly retarded persons during the last 25 years have had an increasing influence in the area of vocational rehabilitation (Cohen, 1964; Congdon, 1974; Crosson, 1969).

The earliest vocational programs were products of these facilities (Cohen, 1964; Olshanski, 1972; Wolfensberger, 1972; Jackson & Antonelli, 1978; Antonelli, Chantry & Jackson, 1973).

Systematic vocational approaches are extensive in the literature relating to sheltered workshops, industrial and military applications (Budde & Mendlascino, 1971; Crosson, Youngberg & White, 1970). Also, vocational adjustment and evaluations are plentiful in the field of rehabilitation of the disabled (Materials Development Center, 1975), but references are limited for the severe and profound client (Gold, 1973; Berkson & Dwyer,1977).

Recent literature has presented a trend to raise the expectancy level of both professionals and the public about vocational abilities of the severely and profoundly retarded persons (Bellamy & Warfield, 1975; Gold, 1973; Crosson, 1969; Tredgold & Soddy, 1963; Wolfensberger, 1967). With litigation and legislation, state and local agencies and public school services have become more aware of vocational rehabilitation for severe and profound individuals (Abeson,, 1974; Vocational Rehabilitation Act, 1973; Wyatt v. Anderholt, 1972). The philosophy of normalization has influenced the area of vocational development (Wolfensberger, 1972; Nirje, 1970; Olshanski, 1972), and has created new attitudes and expectancies for this exceptional population (Olshanski, 1972; Antonelli, 1978).

This random survey of presently accredited rehabilitation facilities and mental health centers indicated few vocational programs for the severe and profound clients. Vocational programs have been developed

and reported in the literature. However, this survey indicates that community and state vocational programs have been almost nonexistent for the severely and profoundly developmentally diasbled as of 1977.

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